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RIGID COURSES *VERSUS* OPTIONAL STUDIES

Our secondary education has become exceedingly multiform. In its anxiety to give the public every element of utility for which there is a general demand, it is perpetually developing new institutions and complicating old routines in perplexing ways. Even in the primary stage of education the child is compelled to choose whether he will take any or all of the new enrichments. When he comes to the high school, the youth must again choose what kind of high school he will attend, or what sort of course he will follow. In short, we have option already on a large scale in our pre-collegiate instruction. Even for children and youth, choice, volition, preference, have become familiar ideas. Our whole education is honey-combed with individuality. Each parent has his own educational philosophy. System is undermined, and is ceasing to command respect. The several periods of education are less and less conceived as definitely chartable territories of which exact maps can be drawn and for which minute codes of law can be prescribed.

Those who wish to serve as leaders of the new movement in secondary education may as well abandon the attempt to devise slight improvements in old courses, or to reconstitute the systematic groupings of studies with which the schools have always been familiar. It is impossible to say that certain studies essentially and necessarily belong together in such sort that they must be taken as a whole and cannot tolerate intermixture or omission. Hitherto it has been the wont of educationists to assume for themselves competency to detect certain inner principles of relationship between studies, and according to these principles to build up schemes of culture for which they claimed the virtue of essential unity. In reality this assumption of the theorists was always a piece of temerity. They have by no means agreed among themselves. Their schemes have changed from year to year. With whatever carefulness of thought and energy of resolution a course is put in operation this year, it will be modified next year in defer-

ence to any trivial considerations of convenience that may arise. We are simply not accustomed to regard as sacredly binding any scheme of prescription in education. Philosophers may evolve what sanctions they will for their plans; but the necessity of meeting public demands overrides all the sanctions.

If the aim and end of a school were to embody in practice perfectly symmetrical courses of study, then the making of courses would be an all-important function of educational activity. But the aim of the school should be to discover, to respect, and to develop individual aptitudes. The school procedures should involve the least possible amount of intellectual constraint. There are innumerable good educations, as we confess by our multiplex institutions. A good school will not limit itself to one form, to one pre-established grouping of the elements. The ambition of a school should be to make its offers of opportunity as rich as possible. There should be no orthodox or canonical combinations. Any such attempted assumption of orthodoxy for certain courses must remain purely local, without validity in the world at large, where tastes are as numerous as men, and where it is an accepted maxim that with regard to tastes there shall be no disputing.

The school, with its rigidly prescribed course, loves to usurp the entire intellectual energy of the youth. But most young people, especially in populous communities, have many out of school interests, which are as important to their culture as the school itself. It is important to a youth to have his mind fully occupied with wholesome employment; but it is by no means important that all his activities find their spurs and incentives in his class rooms. There are many parts of a generous education which the schools have not as yet been able to furnish. Even where the schools are the most developed, those parents consult badly for the interests of their children who do not see to it that their children learn many things which the schools cannot teach.

Hence the school should willingly allow choices of what would seem abnormally scant lines of work. The stigma of a

partial course will disappear when the standard itself of a full course shall have disappeared.

We have already advanced so far that we allow options of schools and options of courses in schools. The next step,—and it is inevitable,—is to allow options of single studies. It remains that we abandon all attempt to prescribe the *quid* and the *quantum*. So long, of course, as we contemplate the conferring of a diploma, it will be necessary to adopt some standard of attainment ; but to this standard the roads should be many.

A good public library, an art museum, a university extension course of lectures, a conservatory of music, a school of languages, and many other institutions developed most legitimately to answer pressing demands, but left necessarily outside our graded systems, are just as much centres of education as are the duly classed and titled schools over which official pedagogy presides, and for which philosophy elaborates its fine courses of study. The public wants many things, and gets them, in some shape, careless about their relations to each other and to existing systems. Hence education becomes a vast congeries of functions, and organization of the whole becomes unthinkable. Within this undefined mass of educational atoms our conventional prescriptions of groups grow less and less conspicuous and imposing. Harvard College is our most marked type of the organized education of the future. The question,—what is the Harvard course of study,—has become wholly obsolete and ridiculous. Perhaps the same thing will one day be said about our great city high schools.

It should be remembered that most of the instruction in Harvard College proper, as distinguished from the University, is secondary instruction ; that is, not professional, but disciplinary. The example of Harvard has no essential lack of relationship to the problems of the high schools. Youth pass into the secondary stage long before they enter college. It is perfectly right to say that the same privilege of choice that Harvard grants, and that has made Harvard marvellously popular, would also make the high schools popular.

Suppose a high school pupil should devote himself almost exclusively to science, or to literature, or to history? Can it be argued that notable proficiency in any one of these departments issues in a culture inferior to that which our youth now get from their very small achievements in the most diverse branches of study? In our fear of a one-sided education perhaps we fall into the error of a dispersed and dissipated education. The individual pupil takes too many subjects because we find it necessary to force upon every pupil nearly all the subjects which have crowded into our programmes.

The Committee of Ten received and co-ordinated the reports of the conferences on the assumption that every pupil who chose a course must take all the studies with which the committee packed this course. Hence it was absolutely necessary to compress the recommendations of the conferences, and where the conferences solicited five hours per week for their respective departments, to grant them only two or three. The true way would have been to keep the generous allotment of hours, and to allow a plenty of options; to allow, in fact, so many options that the idea of a course should have disappeared. The Committee of Ten failed to utilize its golden opportunity. It might have said to the educational public—avoid petty assignments of one or two or three hours a week; make each study really liberal in opportunity of time and material; encourage concentration on a few topics; and do not have an educational scheme to enforce on the plea that it is *the course*.

Secondary schools no more need uniformity among themselves than colleges do. They have the same title to originality and individuality that the colleges have. Each school should have its distinctive character; it should seek its ideal in its own perceptions of the needs of the community which it serves. A legalized uniformity in secondary institutions prevails in Germany; but we cannot imagine American legislatures discussing school programmes and enacting them into laws. Fortunately, all that the American advocates of uni-

formity can do is to get courses made and elucidated by conspicuous men, and then to inaugurate vast eulogy of these courses as conclusive consummations and settlements. It is the familiar method of *réclame*.

The secondary school should grow, not by crowding new studies into its course, but simply by organizing new subjects of instruction side by side with the old ones, as so many new opportunities of culture. No school should have to wait for another school, or be required to follow the example of another school. Nor should a school maintain lines of instruction which the community obviously does not want. What a community wants experiment will soon show. Perhaps the public will grow cool towards a subject because the subject is ill taught. No wholesomer influence can be exerted on the schools than this practical and effectual criticism, expressed by withdrawal of favor from branches not made attractive and interesting by their teachers. Precisely this tonic the schools seem to need. The rigid course is the paradise of inefficiency.

The much desired and altogether desirable "closer articulation" of secondary schools with colleges is by no means to be sought in solicitation of the schools to merge their differences and become all alike in their courses. The college, which prescribes almost nothing, and the secondary school, which prescribes almost everything, cannot possibly approach each other and become like each other, unless either school or college denies its nature for the moment; and as the school is hard and fixed, while the college is elastic and free, it is for the college, at its point of contact with the school—that is, in its entrance examinations—to go out of its character, to cease to be liberal, and for the nonce to show itself exacting and arbitrary. The college largeness should now at length begin to show itself in its terms of admission. The parts of secondary education which come before and after matriculation should cease to be so unlike. Forms of preparation as manifold as the subsequent work should be allowed and encouraged. What-

ever new device in the examination machinery is needed to make this idea practicable should be invented forthwith.

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## ROMAN EDUCATION \*

### CHAP. I. (*Concluded*)

#### THE ROMAN PEOPLE

*Social Life*—The Roman family was the unit of the Roman State. This could not be said either of Athens or Sparta. In the family we find, in its most pronounced form, the absolute authority of the father over all the members. "If any one thing," (says Becker in his *Gallus*,) "more strikingly exhibits the austerity of the Roman character and its propensity to domination, it is the arbitrary power which the father possesses over his children. By the laws of nature, immediate authority over the children belongs to the father only for the time during which they require his providing care, protection, and guidance. The humanity and right feeling of the Grecian legislators led them to look at the matter from this point of view, allowing the authority of the father to last only till the son was of a certain age, or till he was married, or was entered on the list of citizens; and they so restricted this power that the utmost a father could do was to eject his son from his home and disinherit him. Not so in Rome. There the child was born the property of his father, who could dispose of it as he thought fit. This power might last, under certain limitations, even till the death of the father." §

"The power we have over our children," says the Jurist Gaius, "is a right peculiar to the Romans." In truth we must regard the father of the family as both priest and *magistrate*.

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\* Professor Laurie's papers will be published in April by the Messrs. Longman in a revised and extended form under the title, "Historical Survey of Pre-Christian Education."

§ *Excursus* 11, *Scene* 11 page 179.